

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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October 13, 2000

To: Correctional Administrators
Fair Managers
Hospital Administrators
Institution Administrators
School Administrators

SUBJECT: ADVISORY LETTER - 00-03 – Rodent Transmitted Disease Information

This letter is being sent to you as an advisory regarding diseases transmitted by rodents. There have been several deaths in California associated with *arenavirus* and *hantavirus pulmonary syndrome*. We have enclosed two fact sheets on these diseases. We encourage you to share this information with those individuals who are responsible for housekeeping and maintenance.

The California Department of Health Services (DHS) and the University of Texas Medical Branch found evidence of *arenavirus* infection in three patients who were hospitalized with this fatal illness during June 1999 through May 2000. They were aged 14, 30, and 52 years: all were female. Two of the patients lived in Southern California and the third in the San Francisco Bay Area. The patients did not have any activities in common, and none had a history of travel outside California during the four weeks preceeding their illness. All three patients died one to eight weeks after onset of the illness.

Humans may become infected with *arenaviruses* through contact with the excretions or materials contaminated with the excretions of an infected rodent, such as ingestion of contaminated food, or by direct contact of abraded or broken skin with rodent excrement. Infection can also occur by inhalation of tiny particles soiled with rodent urine or saliva.

Recently, four cases of *hantavirus pulmonary syndrome* have occurred in California. The disease is caused by a virus transmitted to humans through the urine, feces and saliva of wild rodents, primarily deer mice. The California cases include a 27 year old man from Ventura County who was hospitalized in May, a 20 year old Yolo County man who was also hospitalized in May, a 41 year old man from Yolo County who died in April, and a 40 year old woman from Mono County who died in March.

To prevent such infections from occurring, we are advising all institution administrators and maintenance staff to evaluate housekeeping procedures and existing conditions that may support rodents. We recommend that certain precautions be taken to eliminate the risk of exposure to potential rodent transmitted diseases. These would include but not be limited to the use of special housekeeping procedures where rodents

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are active and the elimination of all rodents through exclusion or other pest control measures. Personnel conducting housekeeping should exercise caution, and not sweep or vacuum areas that have been contaminated with rodent droppings. They should spray the area generously with a good disinfectant to prevent airborne dust, and then the area should be cleaned with a wet mop or wiping rag. The use of impervious gloves is highly recommended during cleaning operations.

As you are aware, the Institutions Program of DHS conducts environmental surveys of conservation camps, developmental centers, hospitals, schools, youth and adult correctional facilities, and other state-owned or operated institutions. We also provide consultative services for state agencies regarding the environmental design and operations of institutions in California. As part of the surveys we provide consultation, training and professional environmental health services in the areas of food preparation, housing, ergonomics, medical services, cross-connection control, radon, swimming pool operations, water systems, waste disposal, vector control, worker safety, hazardous waste, and toxic materials management. We encourage you and your staff to actively participate in the survey process. We hope that this will afford the opportunity for us to answer any questions you may have regarding environmental health and safety requirements.

We encourage you to review the operation and maintenance of your facilities and take the necessary control and preventative measures to eliminate rodent infestations. We are available to provide training during our annual surveys or consultation by telephone. We can also provide additional reference material that may be helpful to you by electronic mail or through the postal service

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Fitzmaurice at (916) 445-4409.

Sincerely,

Glenn Takeoka, Chief
Environmental Health Services Section

Enclosures

cc: Department of Corrections
Department of Developmental Services
Department of Education
Fairs and Expositions
Department of Mental Health
Department of the Youth Authority